



[Click here to visit other REAL Cities sites](#)

[Classifieds](#) | [Shopping](#) | [Travel](#) | [Health](#) | [Yellow Pages](#) | [Maps & Directions](#) | [Out](#)

Featured on:

[DuluthSuperior.com](#)

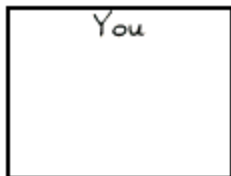
Duluth News Tribune

[Local Guide](#) | [News Tribune](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Sports](#) | [Cars](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Ca](#)

Monday, July 30, 2001 High 78°F Low 58°F [Local Forecast & More Weather](#)

[Local & State News](#)

[Seven-day archi](#)



Find it Fast

- ▶ [Duluth News Tribune](#)
- ▶ [Classifieds](#)
 - ▶ [Find a Job](#)
 - ▶ [Find a Car](#)
 - ▶ [Find a Home](#)
- ▶ [Archives](#)
- ▶ [Home & Garden](#)
- ▶ [Obituaries](#)
- ▶ [Outdoors](#)
- ▶ [Sports](#)
- ▶ [Taste](#)
- ▶ [US](#)

Sections

- ▶ [Archives](#)
- ▶ [Contact us](#)
- ▶ [Entertainment](#)
- ▶ [Page One](#)
- ▶ [Wire News](#)
- ▶ [Business](#)
- ▶ [Calendars](#)
- ▶ [Home & Garden](#)
- ▶ [Local & State News](#)

Lower water levels costly

Great Lakes slumping for fourth year

By John Flesher

Associated Press



MANISTEE, Mich. -- A year ago, David Solberg was in trouble. The water level at his marina near Lake Michigan had plummeted and was less than a foot deep in some places. Most of the 200 slips were unusable.

"I had a panic," Solberg said. "To have a marina get down to 6 inches -- that's not low water. That's catastrophic."

He has survived, but only after paying \$250,000 for dredging equipment to deepen his docking areas and channel leading to open water. Such is the cost of doing business on the Great Lakes during a slump in water levels, now in its fourth consecutive year.

The decline of the world's largest surface fresh water system has caused millions of dollars in losses for shipping companies, marinas and other businesses in eight states and the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec. It's a headache for recreational boaters, leaving fewer places to launch and exposing hulls to collisions with stumps and boulders.

Forecasters say there's little hope of a quick turnaround, despite a wet spring that probably spared the lakes from hitting record lows this year. A lengthy dropoff would be in keeping with historical patterns. And there's a new wrinkle: global warming, which a federal report says could push down lake levels even farther.

- ▶ [Sunday](#)
- ▶ [Monday](#)
- ▶ [Tuesday](#)
- ▶ [Wednesday](#)
- ▶ [Thursday](#)
- ▶ [Friday](#)
- ▶ [Saturday](#)

- ▶ [Nation & World](#)
- ▶ [Northland Communities](#)
- ▶ [Obituaries](#)
- ▶ [Opinion](#)
- ▶ [Outdoors](#)
- ▶ [Religion](#)
- ▶ [Sports](#)
- ▶ [Subscriptions](#)
- ▶ [Taste](#)
- ▶ [The Wave](#)
- ▶ [Travel](#)
- ▶ [US](#)



For each inch the lakes recede, 270 tons less cargo can be hauled, said Glen Nekvasil, spokesman for the Cleveland-based Lake Carriers Association, which represents Great Lakes shippers.

The industry, which pumps \$4 billion a year into the regional economy and provides about 70,000 jobs, has had to lighten loads of iron ore, coal and limestone. Result: more trips and higher costs.

Facing such grim prospects, people are making adjustments and learning to cope.

Applications to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to dredge along the Michigan shoreline, almost nonexistent in the mid-1990s, jumped to 487 between Feb. 1, 1998, and Jan. 31, 1999. The total was 643 the next year and 808 between Jan. 31, 1999 and Feb. 1, 2000. The overwhelming majority were approved, said Patrick O'Connor, a biologist in the Detroit office.

Waterfront residents are lengthening private docks. Boaters are "using common sense, getting updated charts... becoming more familiar about the areas where they're going to be operating," said Van Snider, president of the 1,200-member Michigan Boating Industries Association.

While some marinas have gone out of business, others have stayed afloat by dealing in other products and services. Solberg sold 16 luxury boats last year, helping offset a drop in docking revenue from the usual \$120,000 to about \$37,000. After dredging for months, he has been able to rent about 135 slips this summer.

Marge Mills, who runs a 59-slip marina at Elberta with her husband, last year worried they might have to close. Instead, they're hanging on, renting dock space to smaller boats and making extra money from boat storage, a fishing tackle shop and an electric hoist that lifts vessels into and out of the water.

"We're in the same predicament as last year, maybe a little better because of the rain," Mills said.

The water retreated so far, so fast, that many were caught off guard -- particularly since the lakes had reached some of their highest levels ever in the mid-1990s.

Lakes Michigan and Huron are about 3 feet below their July 1997 levels. So is Lake St. Clair, which isn't one of

the Great Lakes but links Erie and Huron. Erie is down 3 feet, and Superior and Ontario about 1 foot.

The culprit: a long stretch of unusually warm, dry weather. Ice cover that normally limits evaporation in winter was considerably smaller or nonexistent. Snowfall, which replenishes the lakes during the spring melt, was drastically reduced.

Things would have gotten lots worse this year but for a rainy spring across the upper Great Lakes. Superior, the biggest lake, rose 11 inches in one month as its watershed experienced the wettest April on record.

Still, several years of above-average precipitation and cold winters are needed to turn things around, said Michael Donahue, executive director of the Great Lakes Commission, a research and advisory organization.

"The Great Lakes basin is like a sponge," Donahue said. "When you have dry conditions like we've had in recent years, a whole lot of rainfall will go into the sponge before it runs off" into the lakes and their tributaries.

Michigan and Huron remain 20 inches below their long-term average level, while Superior is 4 inches down and Ontario 2 inches off. Erie, the shallowest, is 9 inches below its long-term average and St. Clair is down 10 inches.

And that's before the lakes begin their seasonal decline.

The worst may be yet to come. Scientists say the lakes may rise for brief periods over the next century, but for the most part are likely to continue their retreat -- especially if predictions of a hotter planet prove accurate.

Last December, researchers studying possible effects of global warming said it could reduce lake levels more than 2 feet by 2030 and 5 feet by the century's end.

[Back to Top](#)

© 2001 Duluth News Tribune. All rights reserved. Any copying, redistribution or retransmission of any of the contents of this service without the express written consent of the Duluth News Tribune is expressly prohibited.



[Other Real Cities Sites](#)

Select a City



Go

[View all cities](#)

[About Real Cities](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Help](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Press Center](#) | [Jobs at Real Cities](#)



[Local Guide](#) | [Local/National News](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Sports](#) | [Cars](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Careers](#)
[Classifieds](#) | [Shopping](#) | [Travel](#) | [Health](#) | [Yellow Pages](#) | [Maps & Directions](#) | [Outdoors](#)

[Back to Top](#)